Brief Notes

Understanding Kathak

[This report is published late because, sent by e-mail, it was lost and then retrieved].

There was an interactive evening on Kathak at NCPA's Little Theatre on 10 January. It was made very interesting by Dr. Sunil Kothari and dancer Gauri Sharma Tripathi. The evening came as a revelation for those who are put off by the pure nritta items that predominate a Kathak recital; or struggle to distinguish between paran, thaat, gintiyaan, etc.; or wake up from a state of half-sleep only when there is a sawal-jawab between the tabla vaadak and the dancer; or are awed by the stamina of the dancer who executes numerous chakradar-s. The scope for executing abhinaya to beautiful poetry was explained and demonstrated by the noted critic and the London-based Gauri, daughter of Padma Sharma. I had seen Gauri perform a few times nearly a decade ago and was impressed by her talent that set her apart from several of her peers. She has matured into a sensitive dancer over the years.

Kothari, the accountant-turned-dance scholar, very rightly wondered where the entertainment and poetry had gone amidst all the reconstruction going on in dance. He and Gauri tried to demystify the nritta-based items and explained how improvisation was possible within a given time cycle. They presented several examples of poetry brimming with exquisite imagery that lends itself beautifully to interpretation through dance. Kothari explained how, in earlier times, the court poets would be given a situation in verse, which they had to complete. This practice, (often used in ashtavadhana-s and satavadhana-s in Andhra), is known as samasyapoorti. The example he gave, when translated, read: "The beautiful hand of the maiden was burnt...." The completed verse described a young, nervous bride who enters the bridal chamber and trembles when her beloved holds her hand. At that instant her garment slips and, overcome with shyness, she quickly covers the flame of the lamp with her hand to douse the bright light, and in the process burns her hand. This and several other situations were charmingly depicted by Gauri, so much so that she left the audience longing for more such abhinaya items in a Kathak recital.

The scholar-dancer twosome also explored several possibilities for innovation within the traditional format, like dancing to the ringing of a mobile phone.

The evening concluded with an item danced by two of Gauri's students to recorded fusion music—a mix of jazz, flute and drums, with improvised bol-s recited by Gauri herself. The dance was in the traditional idiom of Kathak, though the music was 'contemporary'.

K. SUBADRA MURTHY

Sruti Sandhya

T.S. Nandakumar, a Mumbai-based teacher of percussive arts, is on the faculty of many a music school, including that of the Shanmukhananda Fine Arts & Sangeetha Sabha. He is one of the few teachers who does not hesitate to give exposure to talented disciples at every opportunity. His students, organised as a tala vadya ensemble, have given performances in many parts of the country and brought credit to their master.

So, it was no wonder that Sruti Sandhya, an event organised by Shanmukhananda and Nandakumar's TSN Percussive Arts Centre on 3 February in Mumbai, was a resounding success. The Centre, billed as Mumbai's own rhythm temple, offers exclusive and specialised training in Carnatic percussion.

Organised in the tala vadya kutcheri format, the evening was made specially interesting by the participation of two maestros of music: Carnatic flutist N. Ramani and Hindustani violinist N. Rajam, who were supported by Nandakumar playing the mridanga. The rhythmic ensemble consisted of accomplished students of Nandakumar, like Vijay B. Natesan and Vivek Rajagopalan (mridanga); Satish Krishnamoorthy (tavil); Sriram Suryanarayanan (khanjira); and Shankar Lakshmanan (ghata); besides others like Mukesh S. Jadhav (tabla) and K.N. Gopalan (morsing).

Rajam captured the mood of the evening very aptly when she likened a jugalbandi to making a bouquet of flowers: the melody-makers imbue it with fragrance while the rhythmic ensemble adds colour to it.

KSM

Tribute To Vasudevacharya

Mysore Vasudevacharya was a 20th century vaggeyakara renowned for his enlightening compositions, most of them in Telugu and Sanskrit. To his great credit, he also composed the music for the series of dance-dramas on episodes from the Ramayana which were choreographed and produced by Rukmini Devi of Kalakshetra.

A seminar on the works of this legendary composer was conducted 3 February in Mysore by Sri Lalithakala Academy Foundation, as a part of the celebration of its silver